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The Violation of a Sabaean Female Servant

Abstract: This is a publication of a recently discovered Sabaic inscription at the Awām-temple/Maḥram Bilqīs, Maʾrib, Yemen. This 17-lines text deals with penance for the Sabaean God Almaqah in expiation because of the violation of a girl servant. The text gives new data about the social history of the Sabaean kingdom.

Keywords: Expiation text, Yemen, ancient South Arabian inscriptions, Sabaic, Awām-temple/Maḥram Bilqīs.

Introduction

The corpus of the Sabaic expiation texts represent a small amount among the Sabaic inscriptions. However, these texts build a specific category among the Sabaic text corpus and are of great religious and legal intrest (Ryckmans 1972: 1–15; Kropp 2002: 203–208; Stein 2007: 13–47; Agostini 2012: 1–12).

This text belongs to a group of inscriptions discovered recently at the Awām-temple/Maḥram Bilqīs by the American Foundation for the Study of Man, relating to the social status and everyday life of women in the kingdom of Sabaʾ (Maraqten 2005: 377–388; 2008: 231–250). It has the style of the Awām-temple prescriptions such as the inscription MB 2005 I-88, MB 2005 I-58 (Maraqten 2015: 107–133). Although these texts are very similar to the so-called ex-voto texts and might be considered as belonging to a certain type of expiation text, since they are related to specific persons who carried out the offences, it is also possible to consider them within a category of Awām-

temple prescriptions. The inscription deals with offences that were carried out by a person named Saʿdšamsum without mentioning his family. The offences listed in the text are that he trailed his female servant, humiliated her and stroked her in his house. Consequently, the god Almaqah punished him with a sickness. Then this was followed by the rites of expiation that have been pronounced in the text. The culprit of the text under study, Saʿdšamsum, confessed and did penance. The text ended with petitions of Saʿdšamsum from the god Almaqah.

Siglum: MB 2006 I-73

This text has been discovered in the ninth season of the American Foundation for the Study of Man in 2006 (Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

Description: inscribed limestone pedestal with 17 lines of text; complete on all sides. The last letter in line 1 is damaged. Almaqah symbol at beginning of lines 1-2. Measurements: 68 × 21 cm, text 51 × 21 cm; letter height: 1.5–1.7 cm. Symbol: 6 × 3.5 cm. Area and location: attached to a monumental inscription and reused in the pavement of the Annex. The original place in the temple is unknown. Deposit: Awām-temple, *in situ*. Date: ca 3rd century CE.

Transcription:

1. *bnmw /s^{1}ʿds^{2}ms^{1}m / ʿb[d?]*
2. *ḏt / s^{1}ʿdm / hgytn / ly*
3. *ḥḏrn / wl/ yḏrn / ḏt / hẖṭ*
4. *ʾ / bʾlmqhw / ṯhwn / bʿl / ʾ*
5. *wm / ḏt / s^{3}ḥb / ʾmthw / ʿ*
6. *brn / ḏḏbyn /wʾwlhw / wṯ*
7. *flhw / ws^{1}bṭhw/ bbyth*
8. *mw / wʾlmqhw / bʿl / ʾwm / f*
9. *nqm / wnkrn / ʿbdhw / s^{1}ʿd*
10. *s^{2}ms^{1}m / ḥlẓ / wṣnʿ / ʿnyhw / wʾ*
11. *l / ys^{1}thnn / bnhmy / ktnẖw [/] w*
12. *tnḏrn / bḏn / wṯnn / ḏtnḏrn / k*
13. *[ḏ /] ẖṭʾthmw / wʾlmqhw / fl / y*
14. *ẖmrn / ʿbdhw / s^{1}ʿds^{2}ms^{1}m / hw*
15. *n / lbhw / bn / ġlythw / bn*
16. *hyt / ẖṭʾtn / bʾlmqh / ṯ*
17. *hwn / bʿlʾwm*

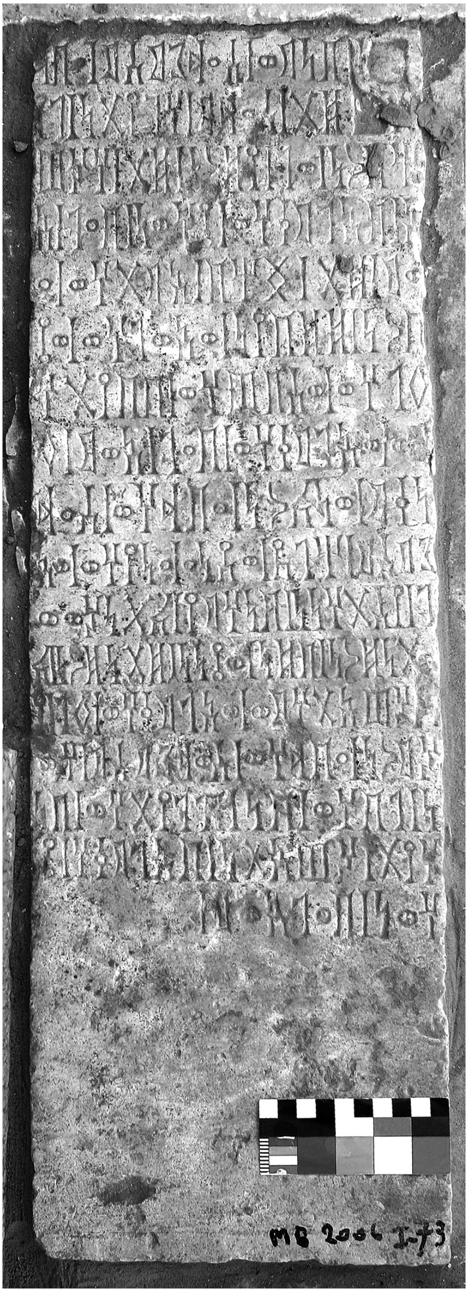


Fig. 1: MB 2006 I-73,
archive of the American Foundation
for the Study of Man



Fig. 2: Drawing of the MB 2006 I-73
by Mohammed Maraqten

Translation:

1. from what (happened) to Saʿdšamsum vassal
2. of (the woman) Suʿādum the Hagayanite,
3. let one beware of [his offence], and let him perform an expiation, the one that
4. he performed an offence against Almaqahū Ṯahwān, Lord
5. of Awām, the one that he (i.e. Saʿdšamsum) trailed his female servant on the ground
6. towards the clan of Ḏū-Ḏubyān and took her back
7. and humiliated her and hit her by a stroke in
8. their house. And Almaqahū Lord of Awām
9. revenged and afflicted his servant
10. Saʿdšamsum with a sickness and with the trachoma-disease (?) of both his eyes,
11. and that he could not see through both of them until they confessed
12. and made a penance with this stela of penance
13. because of their offence. And may Almaqahū
14. grant to his servant Saʿdšamsum
15. the softening of His (i.e. Almaqah) heart regarding His wrath because
16. of that offence. By Almaqah Ṯahwān
17. Lord of Awām

Commentary

Lines 1-4:

Bn-mw s^1*ʿds*^{2}*ms*^{1}*m ʿbn ḏt* s^1*ʿdm hgytn:* The text begins with particle *bn-mw*. This particle occurs both the short form *-m* as *bn-m* and in the long form *-mw* as *bn-mw* (Beeston 1984: 47-48; Nebes 1991: 136–137; Stein 2003: 228–230). The preposition *bn* has the meaning "from; consisting of; in consequence of; to the exclusion of" (Sab.Dict., 5).

The personal name s^1*ʿdšms*^{1}*m*, Saʿdšamsum occurs often in the South Arabian onomastics (CIH 81/1). The text does not follow the usual style of the Sabaic texts, it does not give information about Saʿdšamsum, no information about his family or clan.

The reading of the last word makes some problems. For a reading as *ʿbd/ʿbn* is difficult to consider a plausible interpretation. The upper part of the last character is damaged, the first letter in *ʿbd/ʿbn* is slightly damaged in the stone, and only half of the last letter is preserved. It can be read as a /

n / or as /*d*/ and the first reading of *ʿbd* "client" is preferred. The /ʿ/ has some damage but the reading as /ʿ/ is acceptable.

If our reading for *ʿbd* is correct, this means that *s¹ʿds²ms¹m* was a vassal or client (*ʿbd*) of a person called *ḏt s¹ʿdm hgytn*. The practical that gives the indication that this person is a female *ḏt s¹ʿdm*/Ḏāt Saʿdum. Unusual is the designation of the woman *ḏt s¹ʿdm* without mentioning her name.

The expression *ʿbd*/*ʿbn* is a key word to understand the beginning of this text. For the possibility of the reading as *ʿbn*, these are some remarks. There is no attestation of the root /*ʿ-b-n*/ as in the ancient South Arabian inscriptions. However, *ʿbn* is attested as a clan name in two Sabaic inscriptions as *ḏ-ʿbn*/*Ḏū-ʿUbān* (RES 4228/3; Y.85.AQ/10 = Iryani 62). *ʿUbān* is also a personal name mentioned by al-Hamdānī (Iklīl II, 123). The basic meaning of *ʿabn* in Classical Arabic is "huge, big". Described as *al-ğismu aḍ-ḍaḫmu* "the huge body". Furthermore, *al-ʿabnu: al-ġilaẓu wal-ḫušūnatu: al-ʿabnu*: "the thickness in the body and roughness" (al-Zabīdī, Tāğ, 35/371). The term *ḫušūna* means then "violence, force", a fact with would fit in the meaning *ʿbn* in the text under study as an indication to the violation or bad practices of Saʿdšamsum against the woman *ḏt sʿdm*.

The designation of *ḏt sʿdm*/Ḏāt Saʿdum "she of Saʿdum" sould be considered as a name of a woman. Such designations for women instead of mentioning their actually names are rarely attested. However, it is mentioned in two Sabaic letters as *l-ḏt* / *rs²yn* / *ʿmn* / *ms¹ʿdm* "to Ḏāt-Rašyān from Masʿūd (Ghul 1/1; Ghul 2/1; Maraqten 2014: 75). Further, a female *ḏt s¹ʿdm* is described as *hgytn*. It seems that *hgytn* is a feminine nisbe-form for a place name or a clan HGY and attested for the first time. No evidence of *hgytn* has hitherto been attested in ancient South Arabian inscriptions. This *nisbe*-form suggests that the name *s¹ʿdm*, Saʿdum is the name of the woman. However, *ḏt sʿdm* as a name of a woman is not attested in the inscriptions.

The declaration of the fact uses the particle *bn-mw* to express the situation, the text expresses the threat and a warning for people who may practice such bad behavers. This phrase reads: *l-yḥḏrn w-l-yḏrn ḏt hḫṭʾ b-ʾlmqhw ṯhwn bʿl ʾwm* "let one beware of [his sin], and let him perform an expiation, the one who performed an offence against Almaqah Ṯahwān, Lord of Awām". — *l-yḥḏrn*: The root /*ḥ-ḏ-r*/ means "avoid, beware of" (Sab.Dict., 66). *l-yḏrn:* derives from the root /*n-ḏ-r*/ "atone, do penance" (Sab.Dict., 91).

The message announced in this text is *l-yḥḏrn w-l-yḏrn* "let one beware of [his sin], and let him perform an expiation". This is a warning and at the same time a suggestion of what offenders should do, namely, an expiation offering. This phrase is attested in Sabaic inscriptions several times. For instance *l-yḥḏrn w-l-ynḏrn* "let one beware of [his sin], and let him perform an expiation" (MB 2005 I-88/1-2; MB 2005 I-58/1) and *l-ḥḏrn w-l-ynḏrn kl ḏ-ygzmn ḏ-smwy swʾ* "let one beware of [his offence], and let him perform an expiation everyone who may swear a bad oath against Ḏū-Samāwī" (al-ʾUḫdūd 22/4-6, al-Ḥāğ 2019).

The warning concerns people who commit offences. This is expressed as follows: *ḏt hḫṭʾ b-ʾlmqhw ṯhwn bʿl ʾwm* "the one who performed an offence against Almaqahū Ṯahwān, Lord of Awām". The verb *ḫṭʾ* means "commit offense" and the verbal form *hḫṭʾ* has also the same sense "commit sins, sin"; the common noun *ḫṭʾ* (pl. *ḫṭyʾ*) means "sin, offense" (Sab.Dict., 63). The formula *b-ʾlmqhw* means "against Almaqah". There are good parallels for the penitential form of the text under study; cf. (…) *tḏrm l-qbly ḏ-h [6]ḫṭʾw b-mrʾhmw ʾlmq [7]hw bʿl ʾwm* "(…) in expiation because they carried out an offence against their Lord Almaqahū, Lord of Awām" (Ja 720/5-7).

Lines 5-8:

In lines 5-8 the text provides details about the behaviors of Saʿdšamsum against the *ḏt sʿdm*/Ḏāt Saʿdum, who is described in this phrase as his servant (*ʾmt-hw*). The behavior of Saʿdšamsum against this woman is considered as a high offence against Almaqah, and this proves that Almaqah interferes to protect this woman and regulate justice for the people of the kingdom of Sabaʾ. This phrase reads: *ḏt s^{3}ḥb ʾmt-hw ʿbrn ḏ-ḏbyn w-ʾwln-hw w-ṯflhw w-s^{1}bṭ-hw b-byth-mw*.

Several offences were committed by Saʿdšamsum. The first one is s^3*ḥb ʾmt-hw ʿbrn ḏ-ḏbyn* "he trailed his girl servant on the ground towards the clan Ḏū-Ḏubyān". The verb *s^{3}ḥb* is attested in Sabaic hitherto only with the meaning of "be swept away by flood" (Sab.Dict., 138; Müller 2010: 212). Further, the verb *s^{3}ḥb* is also attested in a recently published Qatabanic inscription in the meaning "to take away, take out" (ATM 866/14; Arbach, Bāṭāyiʿ, al-Zubaydī 2013: 59-66). In the text under study text *s^{3}ḥb* has the same sense of Arabic *saḥaba* "to trail on the ground, drag a long; to withdraw etc." (Lisān, *sḥb*; Lane, IV, 1314). — *ḏ-ḏbyn*/*Ḏū-Ḏubyān*: This clan name is well attested in the Sabaic inscriptions (Ja 703/2; CIH 541/86 etc.). — *w-ʾwln-hw*: This infinitive form means "return, bring back" (Sab.Dict., 10). — *w-ṯfl-hw*: The Sabaic verb *ṯfl* is hitherto only known in the meaning "clean, clean out a watercourse" (Sab.Dict., 149). However, in the text under study text *ṯfl* seems to have the meaning of Arabic *ṯafala* "dregs, lees, sediments, residues"; cf. also *ṯufl* "dung metonymically" (Lane, I, 340). The verb *ṯfl* in our text here may have the meaning of "abase, humiliate" can be understood as Arabic *safula* or *saffala* "to turn downward, to a base" (Wehr 1980: 413); *cf. also* Gəʿəz *safala* "hit, hammer, work with a hammer, insert a wedge" (Leslau 1991: 488). — *w-s^{1}bṭ-hw b-byth-mw* "and he hit her by a stroke in their house"*:* The verb *s^{1}bṭ* is well attested in Sabaic in the meaning of "beat, hit, strike" (Sab.Dict., 123). The Sabaic verb *s^{1}bṭ* means in military sense "beat, defeat enemy, strike, fell, throw down" (Sab.Dict., 123; DOSA, 325). Cf. also *ts^{1}bṭ* "engage in affray", *ts^{1}bṭ b-ʿm ʾwld-hmw* "and he had a fight with their children" (Ja 669/19-20). The term *s^{1}bṭ* is a kind of punishment, see

s^{1}*bṭ* “stroke, blow as a punishment” (Sab.Dict., 123), cf. *f-l ynkrn ḫms*^{1} *rḍym f-ʾw ḫms*^{1} *s*^{1}*bṭm* “let him be punished by paying a fine of five pure coins or fifty strokes” (CIH 380/6).

Lines 9-17:

The punishment of Saʿdšamsum is reported in lines 9-11 as follows: *f-nqm w-nkrn ʿbd-hw s*^{1}*ʿds*^{2}*ms*^{1}*m ḥlẓ w-ṣnʿ ʿny-hw w-ʾl ys*^{1}*thnn bn-hmy*. — *nqm*: “punish, take reprisals on s.o.” (Sab. Dict., 97). — *nkrn*: an infinitive of the root /*n-k-r*/. The verb *nkr* means, “afflict, punish” (Sab. Dict., 96). Accurately, the category of punishment follows as an illness. — *ḥlẓ*: the verb *ḥlẓ* means “to suffer from a sickness” and the noun *ḥlẓ* can be understood as, “sickness, malady” (Sab. Dict., 68).

In addition to his sickness (*ḥlẓ*) Saʿdšamsum was punished with a sickness that afflicted his eyes. This is described as: *w-ṣnʿ ʿny-hw w-ʾl ys*^{1}*thnn bn-hmy*. — *ṣnʿ:* This noun is derived from the Sabaic root /*ṣ-n-ʿ*/, which has hitherto only been known primarily in a military context such as the verb *ṣnʿ* “fortify, occupy a place”, *tṣnʿ* “fortify oneself, take up a defensive position” and *mṣnʿ* “fortress, castle” (Sab.Dict., 143). In the text under study the term *ṣnʿ* should have the meaning of a kind of sickness that distressed the eyes. The basic meaning in Classical Arabic is “He made, wrought, manufactured, fabricated, or constructed, the thing”, cf. also *ṣanaʿa bi-hi ṣanīʿan qabīḥan* “He did to him an evil, or a foul, deed” (Lane, 1733).

Cf. *ṣənuʿ* “serious (illness)” and *ṣənuʿa ləbb* “stiff-necked” (Leslau 1991: 559).

The symptoms of *ṣnʿ*-sickness of Saʿdšamsum are described as *w-ʾl ys*^{1}*thnn bn-hmy* “he could not see clearly with both of them”. It is difficult to determine what kind of sickness this might have been. However, it might have been trachoma. *ʿny-hw* means “his both eyes”. — *ʾl* means “not”. — *ys*^{1}*thnn*: This verbal form is the X-form/*istafʿala*, imperfect singular of the root /*h-w-n*/. Only the infinitive form *hwn* is hitherto known in Sabaic in the meaning of “soften one’s heart” (Sab.Dict., 57). The basic meaning of the Arabic root *hāna/hawana* is “to be or become light” (Wehr 1980: 1039). The verbal form *ys*^{1}*thnn* in the text under study is attested for the first time in Sabaic and could be understand as “to consider easy”; cf. Arabic *istahwana* “to consider easy; to make little” (Wehr 1980: 1039). — *bn-hmy* “*lit*. from both of them”, this means to with his two eyes.

The text informs us about activities that have been carried out by Saʿdšamsum as follows; *k-tnḫw w-tnḏrn b-ḏn wṯnn ḏ-tnḏrn k[ḏ] ḫṭʾt-hmw*. — *k-tnḫw:* The /*k*/ means in this context “until”, *tnḫw* is the perfect form/*tafaʿʿal* plural of the root /*n-ḫ-y*/ II “confess, admit sin” (Sab.Dict., 95). After *tnḫw* should be a divider, this is a mistake of the engraver of the inscribed stone. This ritual practice was publicly confessed. — *tnḏrn:* This infinitive form

means “atonement, penance” and derives from the root /*n-ḏ-r*/. Possibly this ritual performance was associated with vowed penance. — *b-ḏn wṯnn ḏ-tnḏrn: b-ḏn* means “in this”, the basic meaning of the term *wṯnn* is “stela; boundary stone, boundary mark, boundary” (Sab.Dict., 166). Apparently, the term *wṯnn* in the text under study is the inscribed stela itself and it is described as *wṯnn ḏ-tnḏrn* “the inscribed stela of penance”. — *ḏ-tnḏrn* means “of penance”. This proves that the atonement which was carried out by Saʿdšamsum was recorded and inscribed on a stela.

Of interest is that *wṯn* occurs in the Sabaic inscriptions as an object of dedication (Gl 1126; Gl 1725; CIH 392; CIH 393). However, the texts do not give us details about these objects and since these texts were not discovered *in situ*, it is difficult to determine their function. They might have been set up to limit the exterior sacred space of the Awām-temple (Maraqten 2015: 107–133). — *k[ḏ] ḫṭʾt-hmw* means “because of their sin” as an indication of the reason for the confession and for doing the penance which was carried out, not only by Saʿdšamsum himself but also by a group, possibly his family since the text uses the plural form.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to check the inscribed bloc of the text from all sides, since it is reused in the pavement of the Annex of the Awām-temple. We do not know if it was erected somewhere in the temple, possibly near the entrance of the temple, just like other legal texts (Maraqten 2015: 107–133).

Summary

The Sabaic expiation texts usually employ the juridical *terminus technicus tnḫy* “to confess publicly”, followed by a statement that the person already did penance, then the reason or the offences which the person has committed and the texts mention usually the rites of expiation and that the person is going to pay a fine. Although the studied text here uses this term *tnḫy* “to confess publicly” among other aspects of the Sabaic expiation texts, it shows a new linguistical type of text.

Our text studied here gives a new insight into Sabaean society and the status of women in it. Furthermore, it provides a new light on the religious rites at the Awām-temple. Some terms such as *ṣnʿ* “a kind of disease” and other grammatical constructions are attested for the first time in the studied text and added new data to Sabaic.

References and Abbreviations*

CIH — Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum IV.
CSAI — Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions [http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it]
Ja — Sabaean inscriptions published in: Jamme 1962.
MB — Registration siglum of inscriptions discovered by the American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM) excavations at Maḥram Bilqīs (1998–2006).
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* For further abbreviations, sigla, and bibliography of cited inscriptions see Kitchen 2000 and CSAI.

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АРАВИЙСКИЕ ДРЕВНОСТИ

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в честь 70-летия
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